

SUMMER READING

READING FOR



REFRESHMENT

To guide your summer getaway book selections, try this formula: $E=FB^2$

by **MARVIN OLASKY** illustration by Krieg Barrie



I tend to walk on beaches rather than sit on them, but my suggested formula for those who read as the tide rolls in is $E=FB^2$, with E standing for entertainment (which is sometimes educational), F for fiction, and B for Bible and baseball.

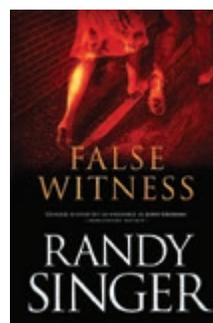
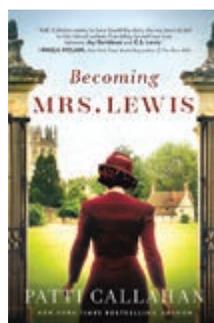
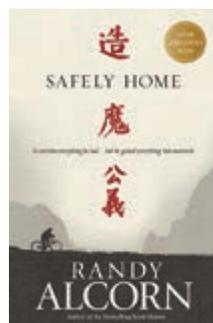
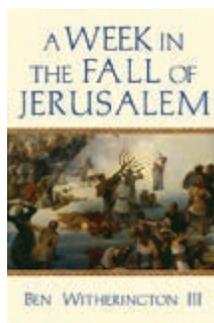
My top fiction recommendation is a clever series from InterVarsity Press that combines readable plots (featuring gutsy Christians) with explanations of the ancient world that can deepen understanding of New Testament writing. The series includes *A Week in the Life of Corinth*, *A Week in the Fall of Jerusalem*, *A Week in the Life of a Roman Centurion*, and *A Week in the Life of Rome* (2012-2019) by theology professors Ben Witherington III (the first two), Gary Burge, and James Papandrea.

I've learned much about first-century customs without picking up any ancient swear words or breaking a sweat while carrying the 160-page paperbacks on the beach. A new book is due out on July 2: John Byron's *A Week in the Life of a Slave*.

Sandy Barwick, who every three months writes a WORLD page about fiction from Christian publishers, says "most Christian fiction seems to be written for women from a woman's perspective." She praises three such novels for beachgoers: *Becoming Mrs. Lewis* by Patti Callahan (Thomas Nelson, 2018), *The Masterpiece* by Francine Rivers (Tyndale, 2018), *The Space Between Words* by Michèle Phoenix (Thomas Nelson, 2017).

In past years I've read and enjoyed novels by Angela Hunt (*The Novelist*, WestBow, 2006) and some male Christian authors: Tim Downs, Steven

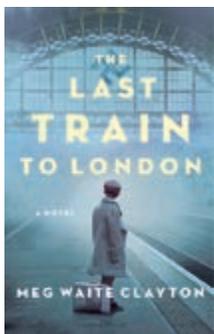
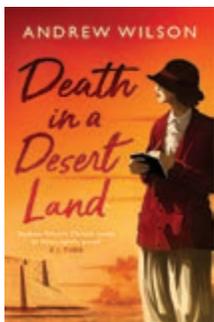
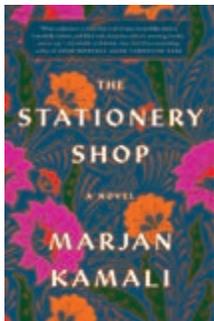
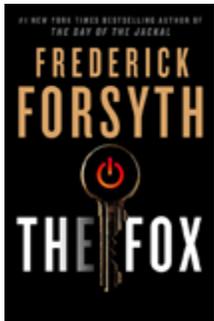
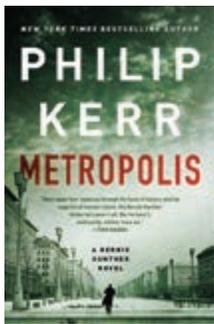
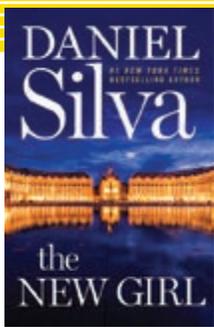
» Once each quarter we have a special section or article about books: children's books at the beginning of spring, beach reads in June, history books in the fall, and Books of the Year early in December.



James, Ray Keating, and John K. Reed. And, although four novels by Randy Alcorn are now about two decades old, I recommend *Deadline*, *Dominion*, *Deception*, and *Safely Home* (still in print from Multnomah and Tyndale). If you like courtroom dramas, Tyndale has published a series by Randy Singer with titles like *False Witness* and *Fatal Convictions*.

If you're a fan of Christian movies by Alex and Stephen Kendrick, you'll like the book version of one, *Overcomer* (Tyndale), that comes out on July 23, with writing by Chris Fabry. It centers on a high-school girl without parents and a teacher/basketball coach without much faith. She has asthma but wants to run cross-country and he reluctantly coaches her, but it turns into a partnership made in heaven with a moving conclusion and clean language throughout.

Moving beyond the Christian publishing world, clean language is an endangered species, and books that value marriage and family are unusual. That's one reason I like Graeme Simsion's *The Rosie Result* (Text Publishing, 2019), even though some obscenities and crudities pepper dialogue that otherwise sparkles. It's the third in a series about a genetics professor with Asperger's (now often described as a relatively high-functioning spot on the autism spectrum) and his long-suffering girlfriend and then wife, Rosie. The first novel, *The Rosie Project*, shows how protagonist Don solved his "wife problem," and this one shows how he oddly thinks through solutions for their son, who is also on the spectrum.



It's true that spy novels often have a mostly male readership, but I know women who like the 18 **Gabriel Allon novels** by Daniel Silva. His hero, Allon, is an Israeli super agent and restorer of classic paintings. The novels include some violence and occasional bad language, but Silva respects marriage and his readers. Each of the past few summers when a new one has come out, I choose a time when *WORLD Magazine* production is in good shape and try to break my treadmill-miles-in-one-day record. Silva Day last year was a record-setting 19 miles. This year's new one, *The New Girl*, is due out on July 16.

Philip Kerr died last year at age 62 just after completing *Metropolis* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2019), a brilliantly written conclusion to his 14-book series featuring Bernie Gunther, a mostly honest detective who tries to do what's right in Nazi Germany and the post-war years. The downside: adultery and bad language. Frederick Forsyth, still writing at age 80, plays it cleaner in his 17th novel, *The Fox* (Putnam's, 2018). It's an enjoyable visit to a new war, the hacking of supposedly impenetrable firewalls: Forsyth sometimes stops the action for technical explanations that he makes sure are brief, unlike the 60 or so pages of whaling information in *Moby Dick*.

Yes, Kerr and Forsyth are man-ish, so I'll balance those two suggestions with three new books my wife Susan recommends. One, *The Stationery Shop* (Gallery), is a just-published bittersweet romance by Marjan Kamali that starts in 1950s Iran amid political upheaval and moves to California and Massachusetts. The second, Andrew Wilson's *Death in a Desert Land* (Atria), is due out on July 9: In it the mystery writer Agatha Christie in her 30s becomes a character investigating strange doings in exotic places. You might also put on your calendar Sept. 10, publication day for Meg Waite Clayton's *The Last Train to London* (Harper), a story of women (including a Dutch Christian) who work heroically to save children from the Nazis just before World War II.

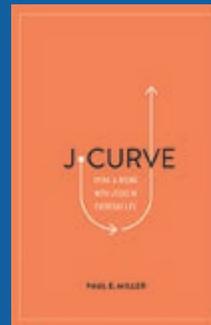
If you like stories of how bad things can get, *WORLD* reviewer John Ottinger recommends



Kamali

THINKING CHRISTIANLY IN DAILY LIFE

In $E=FB^2$, the first B is for Bible. Since we frequently review theology books in *WORLD*, I'll praise only one in this article—and much as I revere Charles Hodge's three-volume *Systematic Theology*, it's heavy for beach use in both weight and literary style.



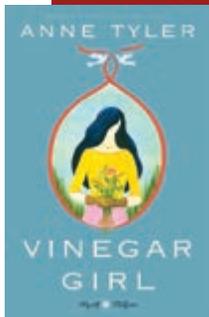
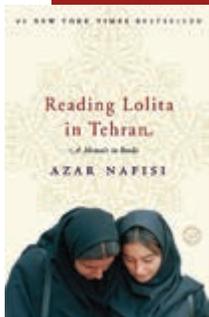
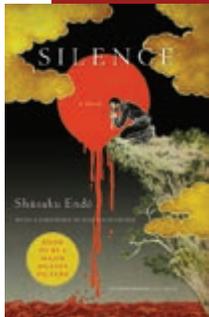
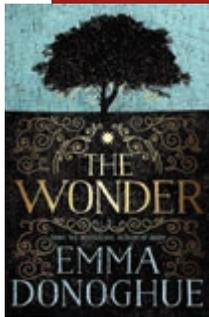
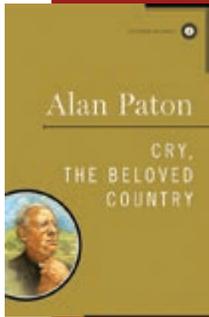
So, here's my recommended alternative: the simple but brilliant *J-Curve* (Crossway, 2019) by Paul Miller. Draw a J: The initial downward curve represents Jesus dying and

our own dying to self when we become Christians. The upward curve that turns into an ascending line shows that Jesus rose and we rise. From suffering to repentance to love: No dying, no rising.

Miller summarizes well the difference between the once-born and the born-again person. The former encounters even low-level suffering and demands that someone remove it. Small irritations become big. We think we're surrounded by jerks who need to be brought to justice. But the born-again person, knowing that the world is unbalanced, shakes off irritations. A person who embraces Christ is slow to anger and quick to forgive and forbear.

Miller shows how the J-Curve is not a one-time ride but a recurring necessity: "The flesh is like email. You answer ten messages, but an hour later, twenty more appear." He gives practical advice: "Conquer impatience not merely by repenting, but by committing to love people who are slow, tiresome, or inefficient. ... If dying and rising with Christ is the new normal, then when we encounter dying, we don't have to collapse or withdraw into ourselves."

NOT JUST FOR ONE SUMMER



My house is a Grand Central Station: Publishers send hundreds of books and most go out quickly to college libraries, the Hill House Austin ministry, and Goodwill. A relatively small number grab a semi-permanent spot on our fiction shelves. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien sit there, of course, along with other classics: Walker Percy's *Love in the Ruins* and *The Second Coming*, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

José Gironella's *The Cypresses Believe in God* and Michael O'Brien's *Island of the World* belong in the pantheon: The former ends with a massacre and the latter shows the results of one near the beginning, but both include strong redemptive elements. Another volume on the fiction shelves contains my favorite short story, Leo Tolstoy's "What Men Live By," as well as "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" You can also download them for free.

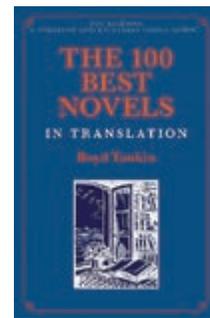
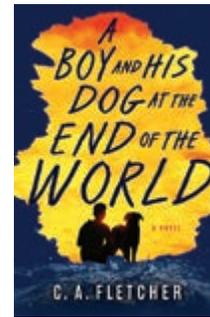
Here are some other keepers from past years, in alphabetical order by author. These novels are not Big 3 frequent offenders (language, sexuality, and violence), but a few have such elements. I liked Julian Barnes' *The Noise of Time* and *The Sense of an Ending*, Gregory Benford's *The Berlin Project*, James Carroll's *Warburg in Rome*, Stephen Carter's *Back Channel*, Suzanne Chazin's *No Witness But the Moon*, John Darnton's *Black & White and Dead All Over*, Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*, Emma Donoghue's *The Wonder*, and John Donoghue's *The Death's Head Chess Club*.

Also: Shūsaku Endō's *Silence*, William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*, Robert Harris' *Munich*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*, Jonas Karlsson's *The Invoice*, Affinity Konar's *Mischling*, Andrey Kurkov's *Death and the Penguin*, James Michener's *Texas*, Mo Yan's *Frog*, Simon Sebag Montefiore's *One Night in Winter*, Ian Mortimer's *The Outcasts of Time*, Haruki Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Patrick O'Brian's *Master and Commander* (and a score of others in the Aubrey-Maturin series), and Jonathan Rabb's *Among the Living*.

Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila* do not need any push from me, but I also like WORLD correspondent Jenny Lind Schmitt's *Mountains of Manhattan*, Ruta Sepetys' *Salt to the Sea*, György Spiró's *Captivity*, and Barton Swaim's *The Speechwriter*. Jeff Shaara's *A Blaze of Glory*, Andrew Taylor's *The Scent of Death*, Patrick Taylor's *Pray for Us Sinners*, Amor Towles' *A Gentleman in Moscow*, Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl*, and Eugene Vodolazkin's *Laurus* all illuminate battles of different kinds.

Let's conclude with a bow to two epic novels that are terrific all-day beach reads: Herman Wouk's *The Winds of War* (1971) and *War and Remembrance* (1978). Wouk died last month, 10 days short of his 104th birthday.

C.A. Fletcher's *A Boy and His Dog at the End of the World* (Orbit, 2019). The last large generation of humans has died, but a few people survive on the outskirts of humanity's lost civilization. Griz has a dog for company—but someone steals it, so Griz crosses an empty world in search of the thief. Part *The Road*, part *Children of Men*, this post-apocalyptic novel explores the relationships that remain after the elements of civilization decay.



Ottinger and I both enjoyed *The Municipalists* by Seth Fried (Penguin, 2019). The central character, socially awkward city planner Henry, travels to mega-city Metropolis along with a lifelike companion, the visual simulation of an artificially intelligent supercomputer. The AI has a virus and idiosyncratic programming that leave him untrustworthy and often drunk. Henry's pursuit of social justice warriors turned terrorists has comic-book violence. The occasional profanity detracts from a humorous story about hyper-urbanized America.

For ambitious beachgoers, Boyd Tonkin's annotated *The 100 Best Novels in Translation*

(Galileo Publishers, 2018) is a good reading list that includes well-known ones like *Don Quixote*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Les Misérables*, and *Madame Bovary*. The list also includes lesser-known novels I've read and recommend, such as *Dead Souls* (Russia), *Dream of the Red Chamber* (China), *The Red and the Black* (France), and *Palace Walk* (Egypt), which has some sexual content. Tonkin also lists ones I haven't read but now want to, such as Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist* (Coward translation) and Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* (Greenberg or Luke translation). ☹



Relief pitcher Adam Ottavino trains in Harlem.

REINVENTING BALLPLAYERS

The second B in $E=FB^2$ is for baseball. Books that can change a fan's thinking about the summer game are rare. The last one that blew me away like a rising fastball was *Moneyball* (Norton, 2004): Michael Lewis showed how small-market teams could compete by spotting players whose merits did not appear in conventional sports accounting that relied on batting average or pitching wins. This year's *Moneyball* is *The MVP Machine: How Baseball's New Nonconformists Are Using Data to Build Better Players* (Basic, 2019).

In it, Ben Lindbergh and Travis Sawchik show how smart major leaguers no longer rest from October to February, but remake themselves during the off-season. Thoughtful pitchers and coaches get more out of plateaued talent by studying frame-by-frame film and implementing small changes in pitching grip or arm angles that yield a higher spin rate on the ball, which typically means more strikeouts. Thoughtful hitters remake their bat angle and their strides to produce more home runs.

Lindbergh and Sawchik include profiles of marginal players who remade themselves: 33-year-old relief pitcher Adam Ottavino is an

example. Late in 2017 he took control of a narrow, 80-foot-deep Harlem storefront flanked by a Dollar Tree and a Chuck E. Cheese. There he set up a portable pitching mound along with a roll of AstroTurf, a rubberized strike-zone-like target, and an Edgertronic camera. For four months he worked at developing a new pitch, a "hybrid gyro-cutter-slider" with enough horizontal and vertical movement to induce batters to swing and miss. He had a great 2018, induced the New York Yankees to give him a three-year, \$27 million contract, and is doing well this year as well.

Most teams are poorer than the Yankees and are unlikely to out-trade or out-spend opponents, but they can try to out-develop them. More companies, instead of sticking a square peg in a square hole and then defending mediocrity, could apply MVP thinking. Managers and stuck employees, as they walk on a beach, can think of ways to emphasize professional development and make the most of untapped potential. But those employees need to be like Cleveland Indians pitcher Trevor Bauer, who lost an October playoff game and the next day went to work reinventing himself for a very successful next season.

